

The Impact of WV's PSN Media Awareness Campaign on Citizen Attitudes Toward Crime and Criminal Justice System Responses

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Project Safe Neighborhoods

- *PSN* is the federal firearms initiative aimed at reducing gun violence through coordinated strategic planning.
- The foundation built upon the apparent success of local initiatives:
 - Project Exile in Richmond, VA
 - Boston's Operation Ceasefire, and
 - the Strategic Approaches to Community Safety Initiative (SACSI) sites.
- Project Exile used enhanced federal prosecution efforts with longer sentences and a targeted public awareness campaign to deter potential offenders.

Project Safe Neighborhoods

- In recognition of the unique gun crime problems in existence across the country, a “one-size-fits-all” strategy was not mandated for all 94 federal judicial districts under the PSN initiative.
- Many districts received funding for a media outreach partner to guide local community outreach and public awareness activities.
- The outreach partner was to guide development, production, and distribution of the local public awareness campaign, as well as to engage members of the community in the initiative.

WV's Hard Time for Gun Crime Initiative

- Implemented in WV's Southern District
- Initially launched in the spring of 2004
- Three target counties (Kanawha, Cabell, Raleigh)
- Main focus: Community outreach and a localized media campaign based on deterrence

WV's Hard Time for Gun Crime Initiative

- Television, radio, billboards, and various other posters, flyers, and stickers were distributed in the district.
- Used federal firearms laws and their harsh penalties with no parole to educate and deter potential offenders and the community.
- Message: "Commit a crime with a gun, spend 5 years to life in federal prison, no parole."
- Intended to deter gun violence, and more generally, violent crime using federal firearms laws.


HARD TIME FOR GUN CRIME



NO PAROLE

www.HardTimeforGunCrime.org





commit a **CRIME**
with a **GUN**
spend
5 YEARS
to **LIFE**
in
FEDERAL PRISON

NO PAROLE

HARD TIME FOR GUN CRIME

1-800-659-8726



A Community Based Initiative in West Virginia Sponsored by the Department of Justice

Present Study

- Purpose: To examine the potential deterrent impact of the media campaign
- One part of a larger evaluation that examines prosecution data and pre-post crime trends
- Research focus:
 - To what extent did the media campaign reach its intended audience?
 - How concerned are citizen's about crime and gun crime in their neighborhoods?
 - Did exposure to the message increase knowledge of federal firearm laws?
 - Did exposure to the message change citizen's perceptions of the certainty and severity of punishment for gun crimes?

Study Design

- Statewide telephone survey of adult WV residents residing in households
- 3 regions of the state, stratified: northern judicial district, southern target counties, and south remainder
- The telephone interviews were conducted in the fall of 2005, private telemarketing research firm
- Interviews conducted weekday evenings and all day on Saturdays

Study Design

- Interviewers were extensively trained:
 - Initial 1-hour training, followed by mock interviews, and ongoing training as necessary
 - Supervisor monitored
- Survey questionnaire was piloted
 - 30 surveys
 - effort to eliminate confusing questions or wordings
- Random Digit Dialing (RDD) was used to obtain the sample
- Eligible households and respondents:
 - 18 years or older (youngest adult requested)
 - No law enforcement or victim service providers

Sample

- The total unweighted sample of 809 for the state
- Weighted samples based on 2000 Census – gender, race, age
- Final weighted sample: 778 participants, 198 in the south target, 189 in the remaining southern counties
- Southern Target: 52.9% female, 8.5% nonwhite, 28.9% 18 to 24 years of age; 47.6% married, 8.0% not HS graduate, 20.0% less than \$15K
- Southern Comparison: 47.3% female, 3.3% nonwhite, 26.9% 18 to 24 years of age; 54.6% married, 17.0% not HS graduate, 24.9% less than \$15K

Campaign Awareness

Table 1. Number and percentage of participants who heard campaign message during the last 2 years by target and comparison groups

	Target		Comparison		χ^2
	n	%	n	%	
Project Safe Neighborhoods	56	28.3%	38	20.1%	8.850
Hard Time for Gun Crime	102	51.5%	59	31.2%	19.910*
Any gun crime reduction initiatives in WV	55	27.8%	37	19.6%	4.269
Composite	141	71.2%	103	54.5%	11.596**

Notes: Composite measure indicates that participant had heard of any of the other three.

** $p = .000$, ** $p = .001$.*

Perception of Neighborhood Problems

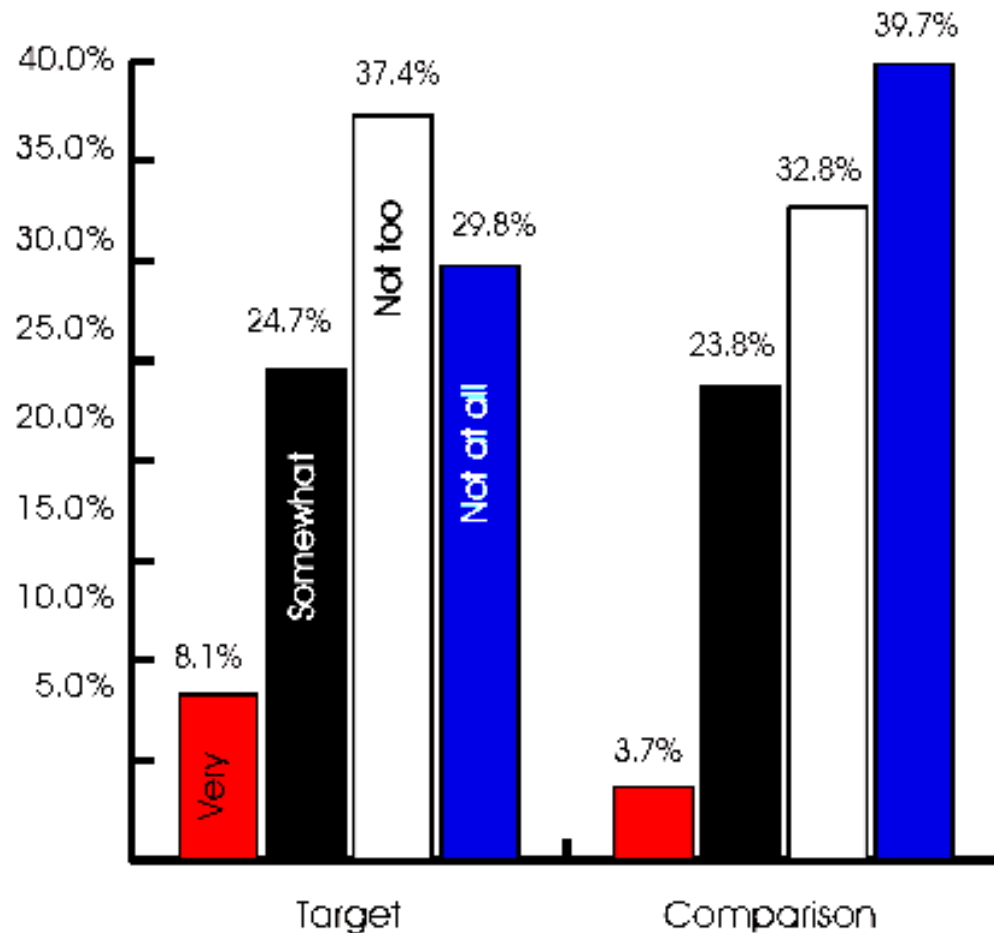
Table 2. Mean differences in the perception of neighborhood problems

	Target			Comparison			t-test
	n	\bar{x}	sd	n	\bar{x}	sd	
Illegal Drug Use	186	5.09	3.289	182	5.78	3.540	-1.936
Stolen Property	196	4.65	3.111	185	4.50	3.074	0.452
Drunk Drivers	190	4.30	2.912	185	4.32	2.914	-0.067
Juvenile Delinquency	192	4.13	3.000	186	3.83	3.012	0.986
Domestic Violence	186	3.47	2.545	181	3.71	2.792	-0.864
Violent Crime Involving Firearms	195	2.77	2.420	185	2.56	2.514	0.826

Notes: Respondents were asked to rate on a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being no problem and 10 being a very big problem.

Fear of Neighborhood Crime

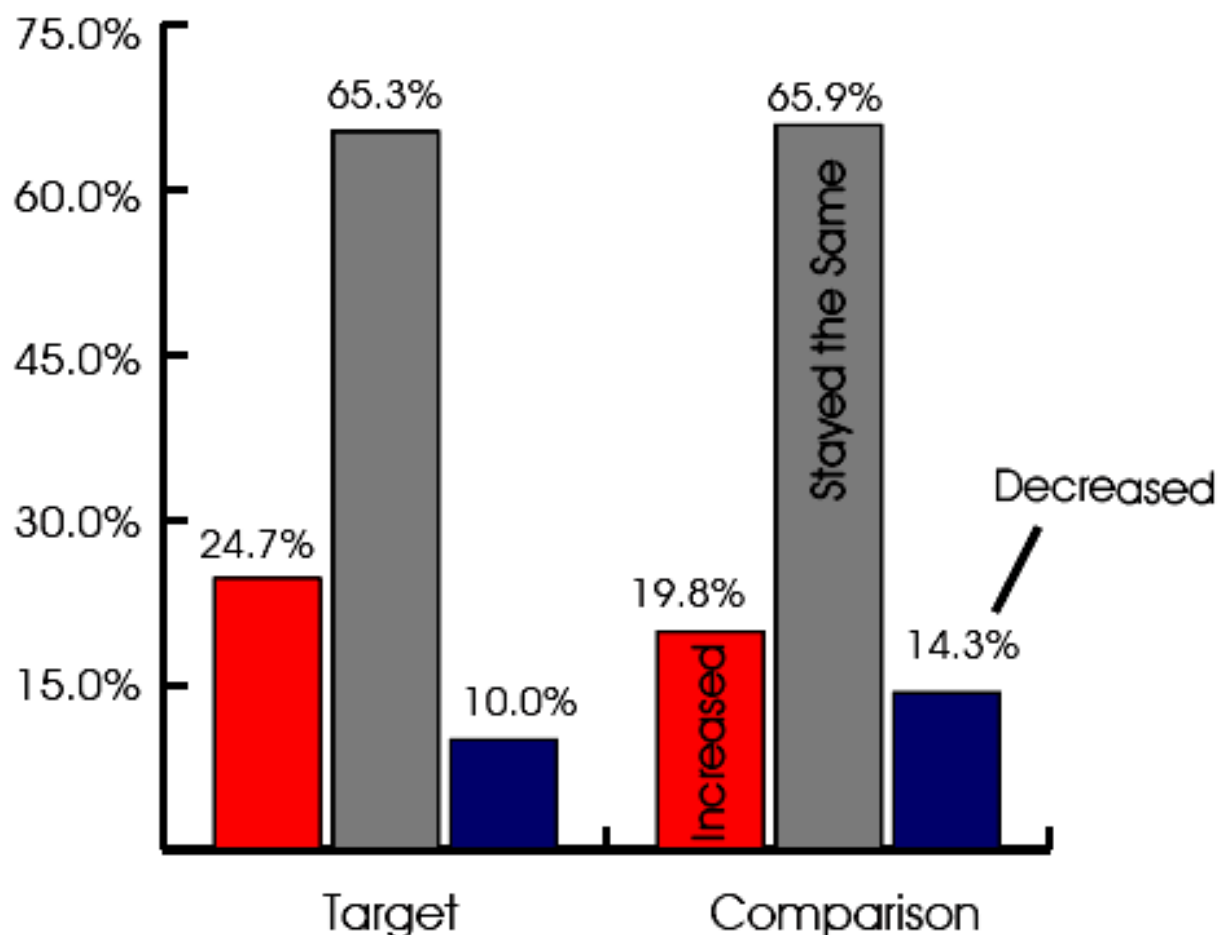
Graph 1. Fear of crime in neighborhood over the past two years



Notes: Response categories included very fearful, somewhat fearful, not too fearful, not at all fearful.

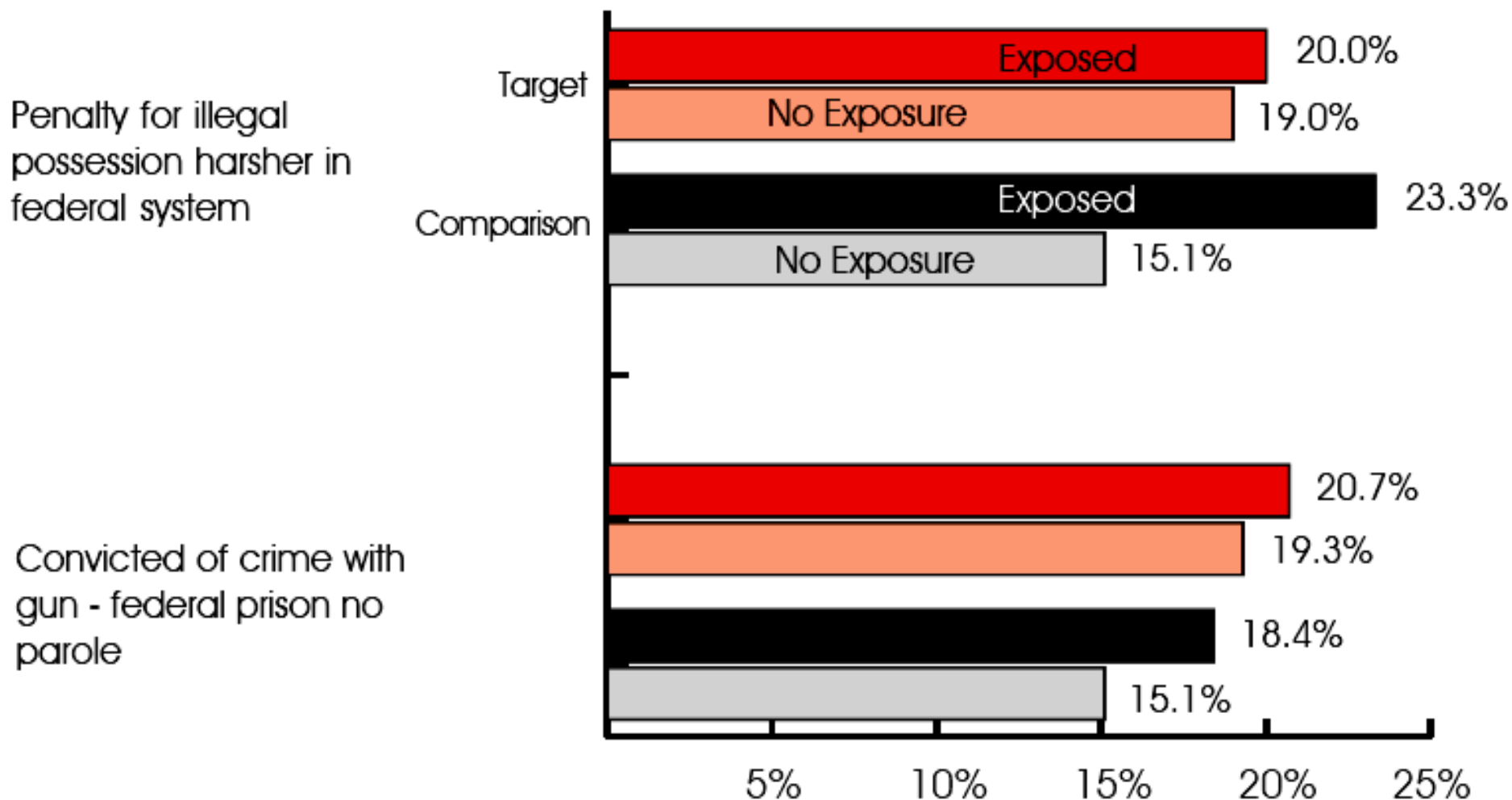
Fear of Neighborhood Gun Crime

Graph 2. Fear of gun crime in neighborhood over past two years



Knowledge of Federal Firearm Laws

Graph 3. Knowledge of Federal firearms laws by exposure and study group



Perception of Certainty

Table 3. Perceptions of the certainty of punishment based on exposure to Hard Time for Gun Crime media campaign

	Exposure			No Exposure			
	n	\bar{x}	sd	n	\bar{x}	sd	t-test
For every 10 gun crimes, how many will result in offender...							
<u>Target</u>							
Being Arrested	127	5.12	3.23	52	5.09	3.26	-0.061
Being Convicted	129	4.40	3.16	50	4.06	2.93	-0.662
Serving <5 years in prison	120	3.41	3.09	52	4.13	3.03	1.410
Serving 5+ years in prison	120	2.51	2.83	51	1.75	2.30	-1.704
<u>Comparison</u>							
Being Arrested	91	4.92	2.92	74	4.52	3.43	-0.799
Being Convicted	89	4.15	2.61	74	4.08	3.13	-0.158
Serving <5 years in prison	86	4.24	3.27	74	4.15	3.46	-0.166
Serving 5+ years in prison	83	2.62	2.45	71	1.71	2.18	-2.427*

Notes: * $p < .05$

Changes in Penalty Severity

Table 4. Changes in severity of penalties over the last 2 years by target and comparison groups

	Target		Comparison	
	Exposure	No exposure	Exposure	No exposure
	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)
<i>The severity of penalties for committing gun crime has...</i>				
Increased	53.6% (75)	39.3% (22)	54.4% (56)	45.0% (36)
Stayed the Same	36.4% (51)	51.8% (29)	36.9% (38)	46.3% (37)
Decreased	10.0% (14)	8.9% (5)	8.7% (9)	8.8% (7)

Perceptions of Punishment Severity

Table 5. Perceptions of punishment severity and/or person's decision to use a gun in a crime

	Exposure			No Exposure			
	n	\bar{x}	sd	n	\bar{x}	sd	t-test
Important of the following punishments for impacting a person's decision to use a gun in a crime...							
Target							
Chance of losing right to possess guns	138	3.48	3.04	56	2.83	2.69	-1.395
Concerns about their family	136	3.84	2.80	56	4.15	3.04	0.680
Chance of being arrested	137	4.42	3.08	56	4.88	3.44	0.892
Chance of going to state prison	136	4.13	2.90	57	4.27	2.88	0.291
Chance of going to federal prison	137	4.25	3.05	57	4.10	3.10	-0.327
Comparison							
Chance of losing right to possess guns	99	3.84	3.41	83	4.46	3.29	1.244
Concerns about their family	99	4.00	3.35	84	4.30	3.11	0.624
Chance of being arrested	100	4.46	3.15	83	4.76	3.16	0.629
Chance of going to state prison	98	4.03	3.02	80	5.03	2.92	2.222*
Chance of going to federal prison	99	4.26	3.23	78	5.04	3.13	1.623

Notes: * $p < .05$; Respondents were asked to rate on a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being not important at all and 10 being extremely important.

Conclusions

- Residents in the target counties were *significantly* more likely to have heard of Hard Time for Gun Crime.
- However, for both the target and comparison group, violent crime involving firearms is seen as the least of concerns.
- Fear of crime and gun crime is *slightly* greater in target counties.
- Regardless of exposure or not, only a small percentage of residents were knowledgeable of federal firearm laws.
- Exposure to campaign did not appear to increase knowledge of federal firearm laws.

Conclusions

- Certainty of receiving punishment declines as penalties become more severe, regardless of exposure or study group.
- Exposure to the campaign did not increase perceptions of punishment certainty among target county residents.
- Persons who were exposed to the campaign were *slightly* more likely to believe that the severity of penalties for committing gun crimes had increased in the past two years.
- However, exposure to the campaign did not increase residents perceptions of punishment severity.

Implications

- Broad media campaign approaches to general populations of residents may not be effective in changing attitudes toward gun crime.
- May want to consider a more targeted approach (e.g., felony offenders rather than general population campaign).
- Contributes to the growing body of literature showing deterrent messages have a greater impact when targeted to specific people and/or places.

Future Directions

- Not able to isolate offenders due to small number with prior contact with system.
- Triangulate these results with prosecution and crime trend data to assess overall impact of PSN.
- Conduct multivariate analysis to examine the importance of exposure while controlling for other variables (e.g., gun ownership, prior victimization, demographics).
- Determine if the impact of exposure is different in target versus the remaining southern counties based on multivariate analysis.

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